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UNCLAS TUNIS 001616

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR PAKISTAN MONITORING GROUP AND NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND
HOPKINS)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: MGPKO2: TUNISIA "FIRMLY CONDEMNS" BHUTTO
ASSASSINATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Official and private Tunisians were quick to denounce the December 27 assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. On December 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "firmly condemned" the assassination and reasserted Tunisia's rejection of all forms of terrorism. Tunisian media headlined the "tragedy" and lamented the blow to democracy. Local contacts also condemned the "abominable" act and expressed concern for stability in the Arab and Muslim world. End Summary.

¶2. (U) 12/27/07 MFA Statement (official Tunisia Africa News Agency translation):

Begin Text:

Following the assassination of Pakistani former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, the foreign ministry released the following communique: "Tunisia learned with deep regret and dismay the news of the assassination of Pakistani former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

While firmly condemning this appalling criminal act, Tunisia expresses its solidarity with the Pakistani brotherly people and its care for its security and stability.

In another connection, Tunisia reasserts its rejection of terrorism under all its forms and calls once more the international community to combine efforts to contain this dangerous phenomenon."

End Text.

¶3. (U) Tunisian media headlined Bhutto's death and highlighted the GOT condemnation of "this criminal act." Citing texts of Bhutto's own statements against extremism, private French daily Le Temps headlined her passing as "The assassination of a symbol." Predictions that this was the end of the democratic process in Pakistan were a common thread in all papers. Under the title "The Price of Democracy," a front page editorial by Ali Tlili in the Arabic daily as-Sabah opined "many calculations and facts are likely to be changed...by the Pakistani street once it recovers from its state of shock." In the privately-owned Arabic daily ash-Shourouq, Mohamed Hedi Haydar compared the situation in Pakistan ("assassination, strife and internal fighting") to Lebanon and blamed the USG for causing Bhutto's death.

¶4. (SBU) Private Embassy contacts also characterized the assassination as a tragedy. One retired Tunisian diplomat told A/DCM that Bhutto's death was a "blow" not only for Pakistan, but also for democracy. A labor activist told

PolOff that Tunisians were "traumatized" by the frightening event. Several contacts opined that leaders, including Tunisian President Ben Ali, and elites in the Arab and Muslim world today are likely fearful for their own futures. While lamenting the "serial" nature of suspicious deaths in Bhutto's family, another contact suggested that the Government of Pakistan may have been involved in her assassination.

Please visit Embassy Tunis, Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>
GODEC